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Unraveling Electra Complex in Kanza Javed's *Ashes, Wine and Dust*

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to explore the Jungian Electra complex in Kanza Javed's *Ashes, Wine and Dust*. This is a qualitative research. Electronic media including reviews and interviews form the secondary source of this study. The researcher substantiates that Javed's young protagonist Mariam Ameen is father-fixated for her beloved grandfather, who is simply known as Dadda. The concealed unconscious desire for her grandfather is unveiled by dint of establishing the fact that Dadda is the true father figure for Mariam. He overshadows the role of the biological father, taking up the position of an immediate father for Mariam. This accentuates the underlying Electra complex in Mariam's heart. Moreover, the use of double roles is also deciphered as a leitmotif in Javed's novel. Mariam serves as the doppelganger of Parakneeti which further aids the prevalence of the Electra complex. Dadda's incessant influence in Mariam's life even after his death and her self-imposed spinsterhood is discerned in terms of her infatuation for her grandfather. This study also analyses Mariam's journey to the land of her grandfather as a metaphorical voyage of regression to the phallic stage which renders in a metaphysical union of the lover and the beloved. As a result, it is a journey of self-discovery in terms of love. The significance of this critical study is that it broadens the research horizons on Javed's work as a psychoanalytic novel. It also enables the researchers to explore theories by other psychoanalysts, since only Freud and Jung share the limelight in the field of psychoanalytic research.

Keywords: Electra complex, psychoanalysis, regression, self-discovery, South Asian literature

Introduction

Kanza Javed is from Pakistan's budding literary intelligentsia. Javed is very erudite, amiable and compassionate like her radiant grin. Javed did her graduation in English literature from Kinnaird College for Women and then became a research scholar of American literature at Arizona State University in 2015, in the field of Pakistani immigrant writing. In 2011, she was selected as a fellow at the University of Massachusetts in the field of 'Comparative Public Policy'. Javed

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has a penchant for transcending to brilliance in all aspects at a ripe age. As a result, she became a professor of English literature at Kinnaird College for Women in her early twenties and then moved to the surpassing West Virginia University. However, her most striking achievement at a young age is the publication of her debut novel *Ashes, Wine and Dust* (Javed, [2015](#)). Javed has the honour of being the youngest and the only Pakistani author to have been shortlisted for the most coveted Tibor Jones South Asia Prize in 2013. The author's second book is anticipated to imbibe the predominant vogue of depression throughout the world.

Ashes, Wine and Dust was launched in 2015 over Skype in the Kumaon Literary Festival. This unconventional release of the book was due to the political tension between Pakistan and India. The Pakistani author was not granted a visa to go to India. The novel explores the unwinding pathways that Mariam Ameen has to trudge on. It is a story about retrieving what the protagonist has lost. It is an amalgam of the endeared memories of Mariam's grandfather, loss of the old Lahore of her childhood days, deprivation of a composed life in the United States and finally, the material and emotional loss of a brother. In spite of a turbulent life, Mariam is resilient and embarks on the journey to find the lost pieces of the puzzle of her life. The book has subtle streaks of political satire, cultural stereotypes and feminism. Moreover, it is a cry to bridge the gap between various borders in order to ensure a cohesive humanity which is ultimately nothing but dust. Kanza Javed's novel also manifests the evolution of her hometown Lahore by portraying the old and the new city. "In short, *Ashes, Wine and Dust* is her love affair with Lahore" (Malhotra, [2015](#)).

Carl Gustav Jung, a Swiss psychologist, coined the term Electra complex in 1913 based on the Greek myth of Electra and Agamemnon (Wikipedia, [n.d.](#); The Electra Complex, [2018](#)). It was an advancement of his companion Sigmund Freud's Oedipus complex. Jung filled the "theoretical vacuum" created by Freud's research on males by producing a female counterpart. Electra complex is the subconscious libidinal desire in a girl for her father. This unconscious attachment brews in the third stage of the psychosexual development of a child. This stage is known as the phallic Stage and it ranges from three to five years of age. Consequently, the daughter views her mother as an opponent who has castrated the former and possesses her beloved father. This breeds penis envy. However, soon enough the growing child craves for maternal love, so identifies with the mother. This identification with the same-sex parent is achieved after exercising the psychological defense mechanism of repression. Put simply, the child represses her 'Id' (libidinal attachment) in order to form a self that is 'Ego',

which is not father-fixated. Identification with the mother moulds the daughter's 'Super Ego', because she now conforms to morality and social mores. Nevertheless, the latent Electra complex influences the psychological development of a child. Female children tend to unconsciously imitate adult sexual behavior with their father without any sexual contact. For instance, many young girls think of their fathers as the Disney Prince Charming, the male prototype of a husband. Ultimately, the daughter replaces the absent penis with the birth of a son to resolve her penis envy. A successful resolution renders identification with the mother and the daughter grows up to be a docile and submissive woman. On the other hand, unsuccessful father-fixation results in a domineering woman or neurosis as Freud claimed for Oedipus complex.

2. Literature Review

Amidst a meshwork of clichéd South Asian literary themes and banal, rather non-literary diction, Kanza Javed looms over the horizon by dint of her opulent writing style. She paints an ethereal picture of her characters' environment with strokes of verisimilitude. In an interview with Talia Mirza, the writer professed that "My work is very Victorian... I do have that romantic, lyrical quality in my prose" (Javed, [2018](#)).

Ashes, Wine and Dust is an ode to the memory of Lahore by a writer who has witnessed the city's metamorphosis. Kanza Javed's sincerity in depicting the multifarious facets of a purely Lahori life over the generations is commendable. Thence, the novel is tantamount to a "cultural mosaic" (Ahsan, [2015](#)) which manifests the evolution of Lahore. "Javed said that the book is her tribute to the city and its changing life and people Pakistani women's status" (Javed, [2018](#)).

Melissa Pritchard's review of the novel has a consequential comment for this research. She opined that "Javed's depiction about the love between Mariam and Dadda, her grandfather, is unforgettable" (Pritchard, [2018](#)). This study probes into the latent psychosexual tendencies of the relationship to bring forth roots of Electra complex which makes the bond "unforgettable" and quint. "The book stands as a testament to the...understated challenges of adolescence" (Malhotra, [2015](#)). Mariam's childhood was spent with her Dadda. The current research is an endeavor to uncover the lurking libidinal attachment from Mariam's childhood which lingers on as an "understated challenge(s)" in her adolescence. The researcher intimates the unresolved (grand)father-fixation of Mariam who has bestowed herself with self-endowed spinsterhood and a retreat to the physical landscape of Dadda.

It is a common misconception to attribute Electra complex to Sigmund Freud because he claimed that the sentiments of a girl undergoing Oedipal desires are simply due to a feminine Oedipus complex. He also loosely called it 'Negative Oedipus Complex'. However, the sexist psychoanalyst obtrusively refuted Jung's advancement on the female counterpart. Freud rebutted Jung's Electra complex by asserting that "what we have said about the Oedipus Complex applies with complete strictness to the male child only, and that we are right in rejecting the term 'Electra Complex', which seeks to emphasize the analogy between the attitude of the two sexes".

Nevertheless, Jung's notion sheds light on the double vision of a young girl who is father-fixated. The fairytale stock of characters of an evil stepmother and a benevolent fairy godmother are the two personas of every mother. The child abhors her mother due to penis envy, so the latter is perceived as a malignant stepmother. On the other hand, the daughter yearns for the incomparable maternal love. As a result, she wants to maintain her relationship with the fairy godmother too. So, she succumbs to identification with the same-sex parent lest the daughter is devoid of a mother figure which is essential for every child's upbringing (Psycholo Genie Staff, [2018](#)).

3. Discussion and Analysis

This study traces the bond of incest between Mariam and her grandfather which coerces her to drape herself in spinsterhood. She repudiates all male partners due to a childhood desire for Dadda which ultimately pulls her back to the Raja's house as a means of metaphorical and metaphysical union. The primary text for this research is Kanza Javed's novel *Ashes, Wine and Dust*, while the applied theory is Electra complex by Carl Gustav Jung.

The novel commences with "My grandfather was a quiet man" (1). It immediately establishes an invincible bond of love between the two characters. It is evident from the use of the past tense that the grandfather is dead but still holds profound significance in the narrator's life which begins with the delineation of her grandfather. This first association of Mariam chisels her life with Electra complex. Moreover, the use of the pronoun "My" intimates possession. It is a sentence uttered by a lover obsessed with her beloved and one who is also very possessive. Mariam affirms that "I couldn't share my grandfather with anyone" (49). The first chapter of the novel ensues with the recollection of Mariam's "first memory of feeling pain" (3), which is due to the loss of her Dadda. Thus, it is evident that Mariam's "first" mention is always of her Dadda who is of paramount importance to her. One may undermine any streaks of Electra complex

under the pretext of it being an innocent “devotion to my grandfather” (82) but Mariam’s incessant references to Dadda’s body and physical beauty manifest a latent libidinal desire. Dadda’s first description is not only of his “quiet” (1) temperament but also of “his long, frail arms and ... his body” (1). A child’s recollection is never so specific. Children seldom remember such intricacies but Mariam’s memory is ripe with the images of Dadda’s body. It is noteworthy that Mariam spent her childhood till the age of nine with her grandfather. According to the psychosexual theory, it is the age of the phallic stage which renders the awakening of libidinal sentiments, although unconsciously. Therefore, the love struck Mariam’s “devotion” (82) and awe for “*my* Grandfather” (58) takes a unique turn resembling Jung’s Electra complex. Once she shows her uncle’s childhood photograph to Abdullah, her brother and cannot cease to admire her grandfather. With a transfixed gaze “I pointed at the father of the child and said, ‘Isn’t he beautiful?’” (59). Thus, it is noticeable from the onset of the novel that Mariam Ameen doted on her grandfather like a lover would, substantiating the researcher’s stance.

Ostensibly, Electra complex revolves around a daughter and her father but this study probes similar relations between a granddaughter and her grandfather because “it was always his father that I was close to, never him (Mariam’s father)” (8). True to form, Mariam’s father is an absent father figure in the novel crushed underneath his professional life’s weight. Consequently, he is replaced by the grandfather. In another chapter, Mariam confesses that “I envied him for a moment” (52). She talks of Karan, whose dead “father was closer to him than we could imagine” (52), in the form of ashes in an urn placed in their house in accordance with the Hindu culture. It is striking that Mariam compares Karan’s physical proximity to his father with her estrangement from her grandfather. Thereby, Mariam establishes that her grandfather holds the stature of her father in her life. Conspicuously, Mariam’s mother is also aloof from her daughter. “I was raised on my grandfather’s wisdom and he (Abdullah), on Mother’s love and kindness”, thereby constituting the grandmother as an alternative of her mother.

A victim of Electra complex has conflicting emotions for her mother; grandmother in Mariam’s case, whom she believes to be the cause of her castration. She possesses the child’s beloved, causing vile sentiments and a surge of jealousy in the daughter. However, Dadi’s contradictory reaction towards Mariam is felt to be an affirmation of the prevalence of Electra complex in this novel. “When he (Dadda) had lived, she barely noticed me. Maybe because she felt that Dadda gave me enough attention already” (21). These words by the protagonist echo a sense of competition acknowledged by the grandmother also.

Nevertheless, it can be refuted because “she said she loved Mariam” (21); because “she saw him through me, I could tell”. Despite a rebuttal of competition amidst the two women, Mariam experiences “a hidden rage” for her Daddi in her unconscious mind, since Daddi is Dadda’s physical partner. She has the desired penis resulting in a victory pertaining to the sexual possession of Dadda. Although Mariam harbors keen aversion for her Daddi, she also does not forego her maternal love akin to the theory of Electra complex. Being a female child, she yearns for her grandmother’s love which ultimately makes her feel “guilty for not being able to shed a single tear for my grandmother” (92).

Kanza Javed has penned down that “The past is always there, like an unwanted friend, lurking in the basement of our minds... They look for an escape and what better escape than to get a chance to roam freely in your dreams, where you have no control over your mind” (143). Mariam’s past revolves around her Dadda and her incestuous love for him which resurfaces in her dreams through water imagery. Water and dreams are a motif in the novel which connote her repressed libidinal anxieties and amorous sentiments for Dadda. Consequently, she always dreams of water which is symbolic of the water pump which her grandfather installed himself outside the Raja’s house, his abode. “I was fading into an undiscovered, wondrous blue sea” (26) denotes the longing lurking for Dadda. It is “undiscovered” yet as it is in the unconscious realm of her mind but she is “fading into it”. This anticipates a lack of resolution and regression towards the phallic stage, as will be traced later in this research. The notion is substantiated when “water sprouted out of the ground with a violent passion” (68), heralding the “fading” in of Mariam’s libidinal fancies in a “violent passion” and an outburst of Electra complex. Throughout the course of the novel, Mariam never ceases to dream of her childhood and water bodies, since both of them are emblems of a “passion” and libidinal “devotion” (82) for Dadda who influences her life choices on an unconscious plain.

The research paper has already contested that Dadi is deemed to be a source of competition for Mariam but she also elicits love from her granddaughter. However, it is felt that Mariam does not identify with her which results in a lack of resolution of the Electra complex. On the contrary, Mariam’s sympathies are with Dadda’s lover Parakneeti, who is a social pariah. Albeit, the dominating factor is that Parakneeti is not betrothed to Dadda. Thus, she poses no threat or rivalry. Rather, Mariam empathizes with her since she could not complete her love affair into an eternal bliss akin to Mariam. It is felt that Mariam is a parallel for Parakneeti. Both females could not attain Dadda and both share a bond of love

for him which is unacceptable for the society, as one is a non-Muslim and the other his granddaughter.

The desire for the penis in an Electra complex can only be fulfilled in adulthood when the daughter begets her own son. Through the son, she replaces the absent penis of the father. Mariam never marries anybody but does have a son in the form of her brother, Abdullah. Mariam is almost a mother figure to Abdullah or at least she yearns to be the closest to him. She looks after him in Washington D.C. and then never halts her search for the lost brother akin to any mother. Hence, this study substitutes the brother for the son as is the norm in South Asia. Many elder siblings are tantamount to parents for their youngest sibling. It is through Abdullah that Mariam wishes to overcome her Electra complex. She is oblivious to her unconscious proclivity for Abdullah who “looked a lot like Grandfather did when he was his age, seventeen” (76). This intimates that Abdullah is the doppelganger of Dadda for Mariam’s Id. Consequently, she strives to gain her lost penis via him. This becomes her elemental drive in finding Abdullah for which she leaves no stone unturned. Alas, Mariam is deprived of this bliss when Abdullah dies in a bomb blast.

Throughout life, Mariam Ameen “carried the emotional baggage (of Electra complex) every day, everywhere” (320). She succumbs to it with a sadistic relishing. As a result, all her ties with male characters are thwarted. She eludes Rizwan, does not accept his sexual advance or allows their compatibility to thrive. Likewise, she eschews Richard claiming “I just needed a friend and you were there for me then” (319). The protagonist even refuses to meet the groom’s family who come to meet her. Later on, Mariam does not reciprocate Adnan’s feelings and leaves him without any trace. Mariam consciously lets go all men who could have been her life partner because “no man or place could possess her” (341) as long as she is immersed in Electra complex. Her “devotion” (82) and “violent passion” (68) for Dadda compels her to bestow spinsterhood upon herself.

The phenomenon of Electra complex has two results, viz a resolution in the form of identification with the mother or a lack of resolution leading to either neurosis or a very dominating woman. Mariam does not identify with Daddi. She only harnesses bitter “rage” for her. On the other hand, Mariam expends her congenial emotions, on Parakneeti. Mariam’s reasons for identification with and pathos for Dadda’s love have already been explicated in this research paper. Since Parakneeti is not a substitute for her mother as she was not betrothed to Dadda, Mariam does not achieve a resolution for her monomaniacal love for Dadda. It renders Mariam to be domineering and commanding in her adulthood. She thrusts

her will upon other men to overcome her childhood's puny existence which could not achieve the fulfillment of Electra complex. Consequently, Mariam "said sharply" (200) to Richard that Abdullah "can't have any more time" (200) even if he wanted a respite. A similar aura encircles the female protagonist when she demands her father that "I must search for him (Abdullah) and you must accept that". Mariam goes against the grain and dictates of her father who is left with no solution but to yield to his daughter. Put simply, Mariam denies all rights to men and holds the reins in her hands. Richard's suggestion is waved away, Abdullah is not conferred "the freedom he desired" (326) and her father is robbed of his commanding stature. In a nutshell, Mariam "couldn't be conquered or diminished" (324). She had grown into a towering female born out of an unsuccessful resolution of Electra complex.

Mariam does not undergo identification nor is she able to replace her lost penis. Her unsuccessful resolution of the Jungian Electra complex concludes in a life of chastity. She shuns all partners brimming with the hope of the requital of their love. Instead, Mariam "escaped to a quieter place" (69) of her childhood. She traces her life in a backward journey to "disappear from... (the) lives" (369) of all male characters and go back to her "Grandfather's fields" (69) "and dip(ped) my feet in the lustrous water" (69). She goes back to her "roots" and "home" (350). It is noteworthy that these "roots" of libidinal desires had their seeds sowed in childhood. This "home" (350) is her haven where she will achieve the completion of her love. Mariam's voyage back to her Dadda's "home" (350) is inferred to be a metaphorical journey of psychosexual regression. After an unsuccessful resolution, Mariam finds solace in regression. She pines to unite with her beloved but since he is dead, she inhabits his "home" (350) which still houses Dadda's symbolic presence. Mariam attains her love through regression. She completes herself by achieving harmony with her lover who is reflected in the ambiance of the Raja's house, "Grandfather's fields" (69), his hookah and his water pump. Mariam settles in this house to gain metaphysical union with her Dadda. Thence, "a mysterious, mystical force of the universe binds them together" (120). The author reckons that "Maybe it is true that when two people who love each other so madly like Dadda and Parakneeti, ... the universe binds them together forever". (120). The researcher deems it to be of paramount importance because Mariam parallels Parakneeti. Akin to Parakneeti, she also comes back to the village in "a mysterious, mystical" (120) manner. Hence, both women are conferred harmony with their beloved. Parakneeti became Dadda's neighbor though in inexplicable ways. Similarly, Mariam comes back "home" (350) after an unusual turn of events. The spasms of "violent passion" (68) of

Electra complex steer Mariam back to the geographical setting of her childhood, thereby causing regression.

The novel is divided into three parts, namely *Ashes*, *Wine* and *Dust*. It is felt that *Ashes* denote a long gone past with many lost personages, especially Dadda. Wine is Mariam's life of revelry in Lahore and in Washington D.C. It also connotes a search for the self through love as wine is usually a symbol of introspection in the eastern discourse. Lastly, *Dust* borrows its attributes from the religious notion "We have come from dust and to dust we shall return" (68). It not only echoes man's return to the grave but is deciphered in this critical study as a return to the phallic stage. True to form, Mariam acquires geographical regression for herself by settling in her Dadda's home at the end of the novel. This is a means of satiating her Electra complex in a metaphysical manner. Furthermore, the number three is indispensable. It is not only the number of division in Javed's novel but it is also the number of the psychosexual developmental stage that Mariam is stuck at. The phallic stage is the third stage. Thence, it is felt that the number three is indispensable for the probing of Javed's novel as a literary example of Electra complex.

4. Conclusion

This research has critically evaluated Kanza Javed's debut novel *Ashes, Wine and Dust* to accentuate the underlying pattern of Carl Gustav Jung's Electra complex. Mariam Ameen's latent sexual desire for her grandfather is deciphered as a process of discovering herself through the sublime emotion of love.

It is conspicuous that unlike the metanarratives of Electra complex, Javed has depicted this unconventional tale of love between a grandfather and granddaughter mainly because the former substitutes the role of an absent father who lives on the margins of his daughter's life. Mariam's childhood is primarily spent with Dadda who evokes libidinal affection for himself in her unconscious realm. The imprint of her grandfather-fixation haunts her surreal dreams as an incessant reminder of her soul's yearning for Dadda. The sentiments of jealousy brew for Dadi who is viewed as a potential rival by the young lover; whereas the imperative outbursts of sympathy and endearment are stored for Parakneeti. The research reveals Mariam's identification with Parakneeti who is not a rival but becomes a doting mother figure. Alas, this identification is in vain as Parakneeti is bound by laws of religion and culture to have an incomplete romance. It is this aspect of forbidden love which Mariam identifies with in lieu of the discovery of the dispossession of a penis by Parakneeti. Hence, such a self-centered identification is futile and does not resolve Mariam's Electra complex.

Kanza Javed's heroine is palpably a maiden eternally waiting for her beloved. This protracted wait has a dual purpose. It is a means for the protagonist to find a replacement to overcome her Electra complex. Secondly, Abdullah is inferred as the doppelganger of Dadda. Mariam's desperate endeavors of winning him over and her tenacity in finding her lost brother are nothing but an attempt to duplicate him as her beloved Dadda. This would ensure the acquiring of a penis through a metaphorical son to overcome the unrequited love for her grandfather. Alas, Abdullah's death and Mariam's incorrect identification render an unsuccessful resolution of the Electra complex.

This research also explicates the symbolic significance of the number three which unravels the enigma of Mariam's subconscious. Mariam spurns every man as a life partner which is interpreted as a testimony to the prevalence of Electra complex in the selected text. Her retreat back to the land of Dadda is a leap to the life of her past, specifically her childhood. Mariam's regression affirms that her psychosexual development halted at the phallic stage.

Moreover, Mariam "escaped" to the land of her past to reunite with the soul of her lover. This ending is redolent of Emily Bronte's "Wuthering Heights" (76) which also glorifies the union of the spirits of Cathy and Heathcliff after death, endorsing their love with immortality. It is felt that Mariam achieves a synonymous unification with the spirit of Dadda by embarking on a journey back to the "roots" of her childhood and Electra complex. "Maybe it is true that when two people love each other so madly... a mysterious, mystical force of the universe binds them together forever. No matter how strange and unreal it ... (sounds) ... it (is) ... the truth and this is what had happened" (120) in Mariam's life.

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